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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to use three public school action research teams to identify the most desirable, feasible, and effective system-centered strategies, peer-centered strategies, personnel-centered strategies, and child-centered strategies for promoting a sense of belonging. One hundred and sixty four strategies were examined. Eight school personnel in each of three school districts were asked to rate the desirability, feasibility, and grade appropriateness of the strategies for promoting acceptance, helping victims of bullying, and helping bullies. The study was rooted in humanistic psychology that maintains that every person has a prime need for acceptance, and that when this need is not met, students may engage in antisocial behavior. The findings of the study provide documentation and analyses of the most desirable and feasible strategies (in each category), facilitating the prioritizing of strategies. Once the priority strategies were identified, system-wide and school-wide action plans were developed and implemented. The effectiveness of the strategies will be evaluated through surveys of certified personnel and students, interviews, focus groups, and analysis of reports. (Contains 5 tables and 13 references.) (SLD)

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Promoting Acceptance

To

Prevent Discipline Problems

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to use three public school action research teams to identify the most desirable, feasible, and effective System-Centered Strategies, Peer-Centered Strategies, Personnel-Centered Strategies, Family-Centered Strategies, and Child-Centered Strategies for promoting a sense of belonging. One hundred and sixty four strategies were examined. The study was rooted in humanistic psychology that maintains that every person has a prime need for acceptance (Dreikurs, 1968; Ornstein, 1995, pp. 332-333) and when this need is not met students may engage in antisocial behavior (Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper, 1982; Beane, 1998; Miller and Beane, 1998). The findings of the study provided documentation and analyzes of the most desirable and feasible strategies (in each category), which facilitated the prioritizing of strategies. Once the priority strategies were identified, system-wide and school-wide action plans were developed and implemented. The effectiveness of the strategies will be evaluated through surveys (certified personnel and students), interviews, focus groups, and analysis of reports.

Promoting Acceptance to

Prevent Discipline Problems

Current reform efforts within the state of Kentucky have been described as examples of "systemic school reform" (Lusi, 1994). Systemic reform efforts, as demonstrated in Kentucky, require state departments of education to actively engage in the support of the curriculum and instruction process within local school districts. Fullan (1994) describes effective systemic reform as being "coordinated decentralization"; a governance relationship which requires the successful blending of top-down and bottom-up strategies. It is within this atmosphere that this project attempts to impact the school climate of three school districts by assisting in the development of action research faculty teams that will prioritize strategies for promoting acceptance (using an instrument developed by Beane, 1997). After completing this prioritization, the action teams developed action plans for implementing the strategies. Effectiveness data will be used in the evaluation of the implementation phase.

Current literature supports proactive measures that will reduce violence and increase civility. Kauffman and Burbach (1997) argue for classrooms that foster civility, and in so doing, counteract an atmosphere where violence is often times a first reaction to the most minor of conflicts. The National Association of State Boards of Education (1994) states, "some restructuring efforts may actually defend against violence by creating a climate that is both supportive to students and staff as well as disciplined." Jacobs, Beane, and Malone (1996) present a model that is designed to address the

security needs of students. Beane (1997) offers strategies designed to prevent and stop discipline problems, school violence and peer victimization (bullying). His strategies are clustered into five areas: (1) System-Centered Strategies, (2) Personnel-Centered Strategies, (3) Peer- Centered Strategies, (4) Family-Centered Strategies, and (5) Child-Centered Strategies.

The System-Centered Strategies focus on the importance of community and school system partnerships in implementing a system-wide attack on the problem of peer victimization (bullying). Such partnerships facilitate alerting staff to the signs of bullying, establishing policies and procedures that address prevention and intervention, creating systems to protect and support victims, and providing system-wide programs to tackle bullying. Bullying is a community and system-wide problem. It affects everyone in the classrooms, in the schools, and in the community. Therefore, a systems approach must be used. Everyone must support one another to effectively combat bullying and to develop safe and caring environments for children.

According to Saunders (1994), safety involves first and foremost an atmosphere of safety, a climate in which children feel comfortable and happy. Therefore, the climate, opportunities, policies, and procedures of the community and the entire school system must be examined, improved and constantly monitored to ensure the safety (physical and emotional) of children. The problem of bullying can not be adequately dealt with without considering system-wide efforts.

The Personnel-Centered Strategies focus on the fact that all school personnel play an important role in preventing and stopping peer. These strategies also focus on meeting the personal and professional needs of personnel; by taking care of personnel, they are

encouraged to take care of students. The strategies also emphasize the importance of encouraging personnel to examine their own attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors that might influence the acceptance of children.

Numerous Peer-Centered Strategies for shaping and changing the thinking, attitudes, and behavior of peers were also examined in this study. According to Hymel, Wagner, and Butler (reported in Asher and Coie, 1990, p. 180), efforts to assist victimized children that focus solely on changing the child, address only part of the problem. There may be numerous variables causing the bullying. For example, even when a child improves his or her social skills there is no guarantee that his or her peers will be accepting. Therefore, intervention efforts must take into account not only the social skills of the rejected child, but also the receptivity of the peers.

Hymel, Wagner, and Butler (reported in Asher and Coie, 1990, p. 175) state that a peer-group should be viewed as a social system with an *ingroup* and an *outgroup*. The peer group strives to maintain its character (e.g., attitudes, beliefs about others, standards of acceptance, approved expectations) and has social perception biases that exclude certain individuals. As prevention and intervention strategies are developed, the peer group process must be examined. When the thinking and attitudes of peers are changed, their interaction with the child will change.

This study also examined Family-Centered Strategies. The strategies recognize the importance of parent-child relationships as well as parent-teacher collaboration. They also recognize the importance of involving community agencies that frequently interact with parents and provide parent education programs. Emphasized, also, is the importance

of each parent accepting responsibility and becoming a part of the prevention and intervention process.

The need for collaboration with parents and for effective parent education programming is critical to providing safe environments where children can develop intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally. As Saunders (1994, p. 22) states, "Clearly it's not enough to teach students to use methods other than weapons to solve problems. We must also educate their parents." The National Education Association (1996) believes that appropriate school behavior begins at home and is reinforced in the home. Parents/guardians of children often need support and training in order to reduce their child's inappropriate behavior and to increase their peer acceptance. Programs that provide assistance and training in child development, effective parenting skills and other areas should be available for parents/guardians.

Child-Centered Strategies were the last cluster of strategies examined in this study. These strategies involve assisting the victims of bullying and assisting children who are bullies. However, some of the strategies could be used with all children and serve as preventive measures. These strategies recognize that changes in some children may need to occur in order for them to be accepted by their peers and, in some cases, to be accepted by their teachers. Therefore, one goal of the strategies is to eliminate all factors related to the victim, or potential victim, that may contribute to mistreatment. Another goal of the Child-Centered Strategies is to help children develop the skills they need to cope with, as well as avoid, specific victimization situations. And, of course, there must also be an effort to help children stop their bullying.

As primary investigator and author of the grant proposal, Beane served as the direct liaison to the school (e.g., assisted in forming and training teams, in administrating the instrument and providing direct consultation to the district). Jacobs and Miller provided consultation support to Beane (e.g., support in developing the research design, in establishing timelines, in analysis of the data, and in preparing the paper).

In developing action teams, the value of systemic reform was highlighted. Top-down initiates, as dictated by the grant, the primary investigator and the research instrument were used to provide structure and support. The power of action-research teams allowed for bottom-up initiatives, including the prioritization of strategies that might promote a sense of belonging and improve school climate. Each action-research team was given considerable freedom in reaching consensus before completing the instrument. Below is a summary of the methodology used to acquire the data, the results (based on data analysis), and conclusions.

Methodology

School personnel in three school districts were asked to rate the desirability, feasibility and grade appropriateness of 164 strategies for promoting acceptance, helping victims of bullying, and for helping bullies. This was accomplished by establishing a research team (eight representatives) in each of the three small rural school systems. Each team member represented a specific grade level or an administrative position in their school system. The team members were given a planning tool (survey instrument)

that included the strategies and the rationale and research supporting each strategy. They were instructed to consult with their colleagues and to reach a consensus on the ratings. All of the surveys were returned. The data was collected and analyzed in order to identify the most desirable and most feasible strategies. A priority list of strategies was then used to develop action plans for each school system. The strategies will be implemented and their effectiveness will be assessed through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and the analysis of discipline reports.

Results

Thirty-nine system-centered strategies were rated by the project participants (action-research teams) to determine their desirability and feasibility. A rank order listing of the top ten strategies appear in Table 1 (a five-point likert scale was used for all tables). Descriptive statistics used to determine this order are also presented. Results suggest that school personnel find that it is both desirable and feasible to investigate rumors. This strategy received the highest rating. The next highest rating was received by "searching out and removing hurtful graffiti" followed by "establishing a school welcome wagon program." Also rated high was, "establishing and publicizing an acceptance policy." (See Table 1.)

The participants rated four personnel-centered strategies. Table 2 (See Table 2) provides a rank ordered listing of the most desirable and feasible strategies. The strategies receiving the highest rating were "establishing a personnel wellness program"

and "conducting peer victimization workshops and training programs for school personnel."

The participants examined forty-nine peer-centered strategies. Table 3 (See Table 3) provides a summary of the rank ordered peer-centered strategies by both desirability and feasibility. The factor receiving the highest rating was "teachers should communicate zero tolerance for peer victimization." The participants also feel strongly that teachers need to increase the "sensitivity of students toward disabilities."

Table 4 (See Table 4) summarizes the most desirable and feasible family-centered strategies. Thirteen strategies were examined. Ranked highest in this category was to inform parents of actions to be taken when they discover their child is a bully. The second highest was to encourage parents to teach children how to form friendships.

Summarized in Table 5 (See Table 5) are the most desirable and feasible child-centered strategies. Fifty-seven strategies were rated. The top three strategies were "counseling for victims" followed by "avoid physical retaliation" followed by "the bully is asked to apologize."

Each table provides an organizer for each action research team. It is felt that action plans will be more effective because the data addresses the desirability and feasibility of the strategies, leading to a useful prioritization (the rank order within each table).

Conclusions

This study purports to assess one hundred and sixty-four system-centered, personnel-centered, peer-centered, family-centered, and child-centered strategies that promote a sense of belonging in order to reduce discipline problems and improve school climate. The use of action-research teams, supported by outside consultation, provides an atmosphere in which systemic reform can be achieved. The data, based on a consensus of each team, provides a solid base upon which action plans can be implemented.

Further research will include the effectiveness of the action plans. Once again, action teams will be actively involved in gathering the data (in reaching consensus). It is felt that this approach provides for support of each team, while encouraging each team to address the unique needs of their students, their faculties, and their community.

We feel that this approach addresses a significant need in our schools. Many schools have failed to create a school culture and atmosphere that communicates that peer victimization will not be tolerated and provides adequate protection and support for the victims. Many schools have not made it easy for the students, parents, school personnel or anyone in the community to report such behavior. One possible explanation is that management policies articulate reactions to code violations instead of systemic strategies that are an outgrowth of active engagement among the staff. It is our hope that this action research project might provide a supportive model for just such discussions.

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Table 1

Rank Ordering of Most Desirable and Feasible System-Centered Strategies

	Priority System-Centered Strategies	Desirability Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low	Feasibility Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low
1	Investigate rumors.	4.9	4.8
2	Search out and remove hurtful graffiti.	4.7	4.2
3	Establish school welcome wagon program.	4.5	4.5
4	Examine responsibilities of guidance counselors (more time for students).	4.6	4.4
5	Use behavioral contracts.	4.3	4.2
6	Establish an acceptance/tolerance policy.	4.3	4.1
7	Provide well-equipped, attractive and accessible outdoor environments.	4.5	3.7
8	Establish peer-counseling program.	4.3	3.8
9	Hire the best (interpersonal skills, love for children, team player, etc.).	4.3	3.7
10	Install doors with locks on bathroom stalls.	4.2	3.8

Table 2

Rank Ordering of Top Five Most Desirable and Feasible Personnel-Centered Strategies

	Priority Personnel-Centered Strategies	Desirability Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low	Feasibility Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low
1	Establish a personnel wellness program.	4.1	3.9
2	Provide workshops on peer victimization for personnel.	4.0	4.3
3	Ask teachers to examine their biases and prejudices.	3.6	3.8
4	Provide program/support to help personnel improve their own self-esteems.	3.5	3.4

Table 3

Rank Ordering of Most Desirable and Feasible Peer-Centered Strategies

	Priority Peer-Centered Strategies	Desirability Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low	Feasibility Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low
1	Ask teachers to communicate zero tolerance of peer victimization.	4.8	4.8
2	Sensitize students toward disabilities.	4.7	4.5
3	Help victims become active in school activities.	4.6	4
4	Positive self-talk about others.	4.5	4.6
5	Trust victimized children.	4.5	4.1
6	Teach empathy.	4.5	4.5
7	Strategic seating of victims and potential victims.	4.4	4.5
8	Encourage students to applaud accomplishments of each other.	4.4	4.2
9	Use video/films about mistreatment/bullying.	4.4	4.3
10	Teach the value of traveling in a group.	4.3	4.3
11	Teach teamwork skills (desirable team member behaviors).	4.3	4.2
12	Emphasize similarities in children.	4.3	4.1

Table 4

Rank Ordering of Most Desirable and Feasible Family-Centered Strategies

	Priority Family-Centered Strategies	Desirability Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low	Feasibility Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low
1	Inform parents of bullies the steps to take.	4.5	3.9
2	Encourage parents to teach friendship development.	4.3	3.5
3	Ask parents to trash T-shirts.	4.3	3.3
4	Parents eliminate own prejudices.	4.2	3.0
5	Inform parents of victims the steps to take.	4.1	3.9
6	Parents communicating zero tolerance.	4.0	3.5
7	Parents celebrating differences in their children.	4.0	2.9

Table 5

Rank Ordering of Most Desirable and Feasible Child-Centered Strategies

	Priority Child-Centered Strategies	Desirability Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low	Feasibility Mean N=24 Rep. 5= High 1= Low
1	Provide counseling for victims.	4.9	4.8
2	Teach victims to avoid physical retaliation.	4.7	3.5
3	Require bully to apologize.	4.7	3.2
4	Teach victim how to cope with difficult personalities.	4.5	3.9
5	Teach victim to face life positively.	4.5	4.3
6	Improve self-esteem of victims.	4.5	3.4
6	Teach bullies they can obtain power through doing good.	4.4	3.9
7	Teach victims to deal effectively with gangs.	4.4	3.2
8	Develop pro-social behavior.	4.3	4.3
9	Teach victims to control their responses.	4.2	4.0
10	Give victims high dose of self-confidence.	4.1	3.5
11	Teach hidden curriculum (following directions, etc.).	4.1	3.9
12	Teach victims to have positive self-talk and to question own expectations.	4.1	3.8
13	Teach victims to avoid rejection traps.	4.1	3.8
14	Conduct social autopsies.	4.0	3.7
15	Teach victims how to deal with stress.	4.0	3.6